



SISTER CLAIRE PATRICE FITZGERALD

January 12, 1939 - June 8, 2000

On January 12, 1939 the world changed when Mary Patricia was born to Judge and Mrs. Roy Fitzgerald. She was the second child and the only girl of the four children these two wonderful Catholic parents were to contribute to the human family. A little over a month later, Mary Patricia was numbered among the Body of Christ at her Baptism on February 19, 1939 at St. Vincent de Paul Church in San Diego. St. Agnes Elementary School was where Mary Patricia received her elementary education and Our Lady of Peace Academy was the site of her secondary education. Little did her teachers or the Los Angeles Province know what this vivacious young woman would accomplish when she entered the Congregation on September 15, 1956.

One might describe her life in a few lines by noting that she was energetic, committed, accountable, responsible, dependable, and organized. But an essential portion of her being would be omitted. Sr. Claire Patrice was an extremely talented woman who loved all of life and people and enjoyed living!

How did she come to the moment when God called her home?

Having entered the CSJ's in 1956, Mary Patricia Fitzgerald began her novitiate on March 19, 1957 and was given the name in religion of Sr. Claire Patrice. Coming from a staunchly Catholic family with high moral principles, it was no surprise that she persevered in the novitiate, made her first vows on March 19, 1959 and her final vows on August 6, 1964. Little did she, or any of us at that time, know what God would call Sr. Claire Patrice to become and to do as she followed Him.

As her friends recalled Sister's life, so many wonderful qualities were listed and embellished. She loved the world and enjoyed traveling around it! Wherever she went, Sister Claire Patrice was always well prepared for the journey in order to gain the most from it! Upon returning she would put together a narrative of the trip including all those details of importance to her. She traveled internationally, visiting Japan on WASC business, and

taking pleasure from her trips to Ireland, and various locations in the United States, including Hawaii.

Sister enjoyed and was proficient in knitting and sewing for others. Many people have the cherished gift of an afghan from her. One night at the Hollywood Bowl, while Sister knitted her way through the program, the lady sitting in front of her said, at the intermission, "your knitting needles are disturbing me!" The percussion section was supposed to be on the stage and not in the audience!

She was a gifted seamstress and made clothes for some of the Sisters, for herself, and especially for her nieces, an activity, which brought her particular pleasure. Her precision and accuracy made the clothes fit well and they were becoming to the wearer!

Another of her gifts was that of cooking! She always had casseroles in the freezer. Sister loved to bake cakes and cookies, and was a gourmet cook. Many of us can attest to this!

Being an avid sports enthusiast, Sister loved the Dodgers while she was missioned in Los Angeles; then became devoted to the Padres when she returned to San Diego. Everyone knew of her love affair with Notre Dame.

Especially noteworthy was Sister's devotion to her family. She lovingly cared for her father and her mother. Her love for her nieces and nephews was extraordinary and was reciprocated in kind. She had the gift for sustaining relationships by her presence to the people in her life. She was a loving woman who genuinely cared for others - family, community, and friends.

The ministry that stole the heart of Sr. Claire Patrice was the one in which she spent herself to the very end: Catholic Education. Whether teacher, principal, Regional Coordinator, or Director of Schools, Sister gave her all — 200% worth to every activity. This was most evident in her last action in ministry. Enroute to give a talk at University of San Diego High School, Sister knew something was happening to her body and she called someone to the car, asked the person to get her purse and the directory out of the trunk of the car. She asked that the person call her cousin, Mary Ann and 911. Even her last action bespoke her commitment to education and her unwillingness to inconvenience others for herself. Both Catholic and Public School Systems, especially in San Diego, are beggared by her death.

Her favorite saint was Elizabeth Ann Seton. It is no wonder when we read in Elizabeth Ann's own words "You know I am . . . bound to love, instruct and provide for the happiness of all, to give the example of cheerfulness, peace, resignation..." In this woman, Sr. Claire Patrice found a role model for education and Catholic life. On one special occasion Sister visited the Seton home in New York and also went to Emmitsburgh to see in person the place where the Sisters of Charity were founded by this American saint, who, like Sr. Claire Patrice, was tireless in her efforts for Catholic education.

Sister was faithful to her students in life and in burying some of them. She visited the sick regularly and was faithful in attending funerals of those she knew or for whom she in some way had a responsibility. Another sterling quality in her life was her great respect

for both priests and bishops. She had a special fondness for the Augustinians, which goes back to her high school days and her cousin Fr. Tom Whelan, OSA. She loved the Church and made no secret of it. She was undaunted in her fidelity to the Church she so loved and served.

The Mass was the center of her day, and her favorite hymn was You Are the Center of My Life. How appropriate for one who love God so passionately. She prayed the rosary daily and lived the mysteries as they applied to her life.

In a professional evaluation of Sr. Claire Patrice, Sr. Ann Bernard responded to the question "Is sister accountable, responsible, dependable, and organized?" with the words, "These four traits certainly describe Sister Claire Patrice." In her self-evaluation Sister Claire Patrice said of herself, "I am organized, logical, objective, and sensitive in most instances, which are my 'gifts' to this position [as elementary supervisor]. I do have the ability to organize, be realistic, and share, but long term planning is not always easy for me. I deal better with the concrete." No one of us can argue with that!

Life in community was not always easy, but living in an apartment without the daily CSJ interaction which community life provided, proved a greater struggle. Sr. Mary Catherine Siminski commented that while living alone Sister Claire Patrice developed the "ministry of the telephone". Night calls to CSJs and others became her special way of being connected to the Community. During the events of the weekend of June 2-4, Sister Claire Patrice called (on her cell phone!) from the Doctor's office where she had taken her mother, to say that she did not think that she could get the booklet together for Joan Viery-Clark's Memorial Mass. Little did she know that she would not even attend the Mass.

So much more might be said of Sister Claire Patrice, but it seems more than adequate to say that she was one of those faithful virgins, prepared to meet the Bridegroom. Her supply of oil was ready, her lamp was lit, and her heart was prepared. It is no wonder that the Lord whom she loved and served so faithfully called her quickly to Himself and we can be certain that she heard the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Because you have been faith in these things, I will place you over more."

May heaven be richer for your presence there and may we who called you Sister, be specially blessed in your going to the Father and may you intercede for us, especially those in Catholic Education and in the Diocese of San Diego. May you now experience all that "eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the human imagination" . . . and may you delight forever in all that "God has prepared for those who love Him."

May you rest in peace!

Written by Karen Wilhelmy, CSJ